

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

2009 FACT SHEET



The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a voluntary USDA program for improving or developing fish and wildlife habitat on private lands. The program provides both technical and financial assistance to establish and enhance habitat for priority species and habitat types.

Eligible applicants work with their local Natural Resources Conservation Service staff to prepare and implement a wildlife plan of operations. The plan becomes the basis for a contract which, if funded through a competitive ranking process, provides payments for completed practices that create or improve the approved wildlife habitat.

Wildlife Plan of Operations

The wildlife plan of operations describes the land user's goals for improving habitat and lists the conservation practices as well as a schedule for implementation.

The plan is ranked based on how well it meets national, state and species specific habitat goals, as well as for cost efficiency (providing the greatest benefit for the least cost). If selected for funding, the applicant will enter into a contract agreement with NRCS that will last for one year after the last practice is installed. The wildlife plan of operations becomes an integral part of the contract.

Payments are made after practices are installed. Applicants agree to maintain the installed practices for their normal lifespan, which is set out in the contract. NRCS conducts annual reviews of the contract with the landowner to monitor practice success or failure and determine if plan modifications are needed.



Who Is Eligible?

To participate in WHIP, applicants must have an interest in the agricultural operation, including forestry, and must own or have control of the land under consideration. Land is not eligible for WHIP if it is currently enrolled in another USDA Farm Bill conservation program such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) or the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP). Land is also ineligible if it is used for mitigation purposes, or if it is publically owned.

For further information on WHIP or to sign up for the program, contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service at your local USDA Service Center. Sign-up is open year-round. Additional information is also available online at <http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov>.

What is the Contract Period?

Contracts have a minimum term that ends one year after the implementation of the last scheduled practice and a maximum term of ten years. Contracts provide pre-determined program payments to the producer for the implementation of the planned practices according to a schedule developed in conjunction with the producer.

The schedule identifies the conservation practice extent (amount), date to be installed, and payment. The practices are subject to NRCS technical standards adapted for local conditions. Any deviation from the contract schedule is considered a contract violation unless approved in advance.

What are the Payment Rates and Terms?

Program payment rates in New Jersey are calculated at either 60% or 75% of the typical cost of implementing the practice, as determined by the habitat benefit of the practice. When the applicant is a beginning farmer, socially disadvantaged or limited resource producer, the rates are 25% higher, up to a maximum of 90%. Payments are made after conservation practices are implemented to the standards agreed to in advance.

There is an annual payment limitation of \$50,000 per person per year for WHIP contracts. Partnering agencies and organizations may be available to provide additional technical and financial assistance.

Funding and Priority Projects

NRCS and their wildlife partners in the state developed a state plan to direct WHIP financial and technical assistance in several areas. Applications are accepted year-round for individual projects that meet one of these objectives:

- **Pollinator Habitat**

Pollinators are vital to the agricultural industry. As honey bees continue to suffer from an unknown cause, it is even more important for farmers to attract native bees, wasps, flies, and other pollinators to their crops. Providing nectar, pollen and larval food sources for pollinators and year-round habitat can attract and sustain these species. Field borders, center pivot corners and other odd areas around a farm are suitable for pollinator habitat.

- **Grasslands Habitat**

Grasslands are a declining habitat critical to a number of ground-nesting birds, several of which are state threatened or endangered. Funding is provided to create and manage grasslands and savannahs that provide habitat for these species. An emphasis will be placed on establishing native plant species.

Any disturbance during the nesting season, April 1st through July 15th, is prohibited on these lands, but they may be used for the production of agricultural products such as biofuels and mulch hay, both compatible uses.

If participants under this priority agree to maintain the grasslands for an extended period, they may choose a 15-year contract term and receive a higher payment rate.

- **Disturbance-dependent Habitat**

Habitats that depend upon a natural or human-induced disturbance in order to regenerate, such as Atlantic white cedar forests, fire dependent plant communities and scrub/shrub habitats can be effectively managed through WHIP to sustain the species that depend on them.

As an example: thinning of Pine Barrens forests, normally provided through natural wildfires, will provide critical habitat for native plants and small animals and a source of income for farmers.

- **Bog Turtle Priority Species**

Bog turtles depend on actively grazed areas for their habitat. Under this category, the habitat can be enhanced or maintained for this federally threatened species while still providing pastures for livestock.

- **Wetland Habitat**

Small wetlands are vital to sustain many wetland species such as amphibians, reptiles and birds. These species may help control insect pests on the farm year-round. Creating and managing wetland habitats in forested wetlands, coastal wetlands and riparian habitats can help protect these species from decline. Focus is on land not likely to be funded by the Wetlands Reserve Program.

- **Delaware Bay Priority Area**

The Delaware Bay counties of Cape May, Cumberland, and Salem are globally important habitat for many migratory wildlife species and have been designated as a priority area for WHIP in New Jersey.

Any habitat enhancement project in this priority area that benefits a declining species may be eligible for funding and technical assistance.

For More Information or to Sign Up, Contact Your Local USDA Service Center:

Burlington, Camden and Ocean counties
Columbus Service Center (1971 Jacksonville-Jobstown Rd)
Telephone: (609) 267-1639

Mercer, Middlesex and Monmouth counties
Freehold Service Center (4000 Kozloski Road)
Telephone: (732) 462-0075

Hunterdon, Somerset and Union counties
Frenchtown Service Center (687 Pittstown Rd Suite 2)
Telephone: (908) 782-4614

Bergen, Morris, Passaic, Sussex and Warren counties
Hackettstown Service Center (Bldg #1, 101 Bilby Road)
Telephone: (908) 852-2576

Atlantic, Cape May and Cumberland counties
Vineland Service Center (1317 South Main Rd. Bldg 3)
Telephone: (856) 205-1225

Gloucester and Salem counties
Woodstown Service Center (51 Cheney Road, Suite 2)
Telephone: (856) 769-1126

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